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ABSTRACT

Written by 10 middle school students, this booklet provides information needed to become a youth consultant in the service learning field. Section 1 provides a job description of a youth consultant. It lists duties of a youth consultant at school and locally, statewide, or nationally. Section 2 sets forth the selection criteria for youth consultants. A job application form that can be used in the process of youth consultant selection follows in Section 3. Section 4 describes the aspects that should be included in the formal training of the consultant: service learning knowledge, service learning experience, teamwork experience, and communication skills. Section 5 makes clear the professional and personal responsibilities of the youth consultant in dealing with school requirements, team cooperation, reflection on one's strengths and weaknesses, keeping up with service, and time management. Section 6 offers recommendations for formal and informal presentations: preparation, how to keep the audience involved and interested, adjusting the presentation to keep the audience's attention, indicators that one is losing his or her audience, and examples of informal settings. Section 7 describes benefits derived from being a youth consultant. (YLB)

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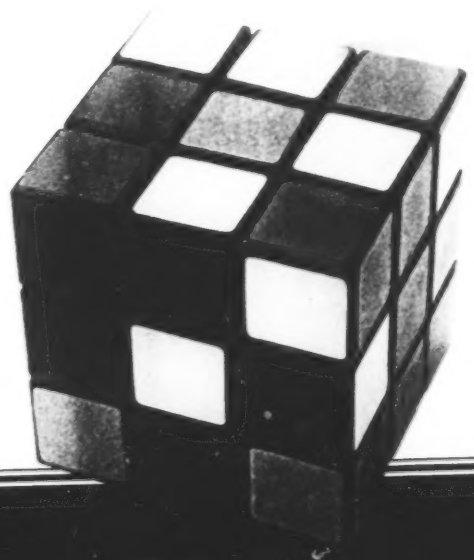
LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Youth Consultants

Putting It All Together



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Youth Consultants

Putting It All Together

by Wren Middle School Youth Consultants

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Introducing The Authors

Youth Consultants: Putting It All Together has been written by ten students from Wren Middle School, Piedmont, South Carolina. These students have served the service learning field as youth consultants, advocating for service learning at the local, state, regional, and national level.

John Barnett is an eighth grader and has been involved in service learning activities for four years. He serves as a member of the school's service learning committee and has presented at a national service learning conference. "*I have learned that you cannot give a speech about something you don't have firsthand knowledge about; consequently, you must stay on the front line of service learning.*"

Abby Cantrell has been involved in service learning for four years at Wren Middle School and now will be heading for high school. She has shared her service learning expertise with student teachers and graduate students, as well as presented at a national conference. "*Service learning has instilled in me an acute awareness of others' needs and a wish to make a difference.*"

Jessie Cook has been involved as a youth consultant throughout her middle school career and will now move on to high school. She has presented at local, state, regional, and national service learning events as a workshop leader and motivational speaker. Jessie also promotes the cause of service learning through her writing for local newspapers and national magazines. "*Service learning has become a part of who I am. I have grown and developed confidence in myself and in my own abilities.*"

Amanda Davis, an eighth grader, has served as a consultant for two years with experience presenting at colleges, other schools, and a national conference. She has trained as a puppeteer for the school's puppet club, part of its service learning program. "*Service learning has helped me find direction for my life.*"

Brian Erskine, a seventh grader, is the youngest youth consultant at Wren. He has presented at local colleges, is a member of the school's service learning committee, and helped at a national service learning conference. "*I enjoy learning new things about service learning and love sharing what I learn with others.*"

Amber Hargette is an eighth grade student who serves on the school's service learning committee. She has presented at numerous workshops and is committed to doing a good job to help other people. "*Being involved in service learning has not only allowed me to serve; it has made service a part of my life.*"

Jill Hartwig, an eighth grader at Wren, has been involved in service learning activities and responsibilities for over three years. She has presented at local schools and colleges as well as at a national service learning conference. "*I enjoy participating and planning service learning projects at my school and always look forward to the joy I get from helping others.*"

Destarte Haun is an eighth grader at Wren Middle School. She has presented at numerous conferences, colleges, and workshops on her experiences in service learning. Destarte loves to help others, from kindergartners to grandparents. "*Because of my participation in service learning, I have gained confidence in myself as a speaker and as a service provider.*"

Derrick Simpson has been involved in service learning for three years and has served as a youth consultant for the past year. In addition to presenting at numerous events, he has served as a member of the school's Guardian Angels of the Humane Society. "*Service learning is like a master key to me because it has opened many doors of opportunity where I get to serve the community.*"

Chris Stokes will be going on to high school this year. He has been involved in service learning activities at Wren Middle School for the past four years and as a youth consultant has presented at numerous workshops and colleges. "*Service learning has helped me develop a sense of responsibility and has made me more aware of community needs.*"

These youth consultants were participants in the National Peer Consultant Initiative, funded through the National Service Learning Cooperative by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Acknowledgements

We thank our advisors, Susan Wolfe and Mike Hughes, for their support, encouragement, and assistance with our book. We also appreciate the suggestions made by youth consultants from Spring Valley High School, Columbia, South Carolina—Benji Burnett, Casey Hastings, and Greg Branch, and their advisor, Beverly Hiott—which have made our book more useful for you, the reader.

An Invitation

So you're interested in becoming a youth consultant or helping some lucky youth become a consultant? Well, you've come to the right place! This book will establish a base for you to work from. It will verify the role of the youth consultant, give examples for youth, make clear the professional and personal responsibilities of the youth consultant, and much more. Being a youth consultant has many benefits, and we would like for those benefits to be as clear to you as they are to us. We think this book will do the job.

As youth consultants and authors of this book, it is our goal to educate others. In addition to educating, we wish to motivate others to become more involved in service learning. Ultimately, we would like for everyone to experience the benefits of service learning and reflect on their growth as we have.

Our firsthand knowledge has given us a lot of insight into exactly what you want to know most. We hope this book gets you excited about the world of being a youth consultant. Now that you have started, don't look back. Look straight ahead into all the things a youth consultant can do. Make yourself or the talented youths you are associated with true advocates for service learning.

So welcome to our book—and now yours! We hope you will find all this information very helpful. Now hang on and enjoy the ride that youth consultants bring to service learning.

John Barnett, Abby Cantrell, Jessie Cook, Amanda Davis,
Brian Erskine, Amber Hargette, Jill Hartwig, Destarte Haun,
Derrick Simpson, and Chris Stokes
Youth Consultants from Wren Middle School
Piedmont, South Carolina

Job Description

A Youth Consultant is a young person who has a basic understanding of service learning and has been selected to be a youth voice to educate and motivate other youth and adults.

Youth consultants are needed to provide a youth voice in a service learning partnership of adults and youth. Youth involvement is critical to the success of any service learning program.

What is a youth consultant? A soldier on the front line of service learning. A leader of the pack. A motivator. An educator. But what exactly is the role of a youth consultant? Some duties include:

At School

- Serving on a schoolwide service learning committee
- Being involved in service learning during and after school
- Writing for the school newspaper about service learning
- Hosting visitors to the school who wish to learn more about service learning

Locally, Statewide, or Nationally

- Making site visits with the adult consultant to provide the youth perspective
- Advocating for student involvement by advising teachers on the role of youth in developing service learning programs
- Consulting with students, teachers, and others interested in service learning by telephone and/or e-mail
- Giving formal presentations to teachers, community leaders, or others
- Meeting with groups of students to develop service learning projects
- Serving on student or adult/student panels
- Making videos or multimedia presentations concerning service learning
- Writing articles for various publications including local newspapers
- Collaborating with other youth or adults to advocate for service learning
- Making presentations to classes of student teachers

Selection Criteria

The selection process for youth consultants can vary based upon established procedures. There are several approaches to the selection of youth consultants. Some regions have developed youth advisory boards where students have been chosen by adults. In other situations, students can volunteer themselves to serve as youth consultants.

In some of our service learning activities, we have developed a Job Application form. This form, which is on pages 9 and 10, can be used in the process of youth consultant selection.

Youth consultants can be selected based upon the following criteria:

- Teacher recommendation
- Service learning experience
- Ability to articulate the student perspective of the service learning process
- Ability to communicate via telephone or e-mail
- Availability to present and share experiences
- Leadership potential
- Strong character
- Sense of civic responsibility

Job Application

Service Learning Youth Consultant Application

Name: _____
Last First Middle

Grade: _____ Homeroom Teacher _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State_____Zip _____

Phone Number _____

List your grades for the most recent grading term:

Math _____ Science _____ Social Studies _____

English _____ Reading _____ Other _____

Please list experiences or training you have had that will qualify you for the position of Youth Consultant. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

On a separate piece of paper, explain in 100 words or less why you should be considered for the position of Youth Consultant. Discuss what you can offer as a Youth Consultant as well as what you hope to learn from being one.

(Form example is continued on the back of this page.)

Job Application (back)

Your parent(s) or guardian(s) must fill in the following information:

As parent or guardian of _____
I am aware of the commitment my child is making if he/she is chosen for the position of Youth Consultant. This might include additional time outside of the school day.

- ☐ I am aware that I am responsible for providing transportation to and from school for any additional sessions after school. Transportation to off-site locations will be provided by the district.
- ☐ I am aware that my child's academic grades should be maintained. I will help my child strive to maintain high standards in all classes.
- ☐ I am aware that my child will not incur any additional expenses connected with his/her participation as a Youth Consultant.

Signature of
Parent or Guardian _____

Date _____

Preparation

After you are chosen as a youth consultant for service learning, it is important that you are trained in order for you to be successful as a true ambassador. Training to be a youth consultant is basically the same regardless of the age of the student. The following aspects should be included in the formal training of the consultant:

Service Learning Knowledge

The basic skills of service learning must be known by the youth consultant. We recommend that all youth consultants have:

- Understanding of the difference between service learning and community service, knowing that service learning connects the service activity to what is going on in the classroom
- Knowledge of the basic concepts of service learning including its definition, the four components—preparation, action, reflection, and celebration—and benefits
- Knowledge of service learning projects currently going on at school
- Understanding of how to conduct an assessment of the needs of the school or community setting

Service Learning Experience

As a youth consultant, you will be given more opportunities to be involved in projects, and you will develop a greater sense of ownership and thus will experience firsthand the benefits of participation. Actual participation also gives the consultant a wealth of stories and personal observations that can be shared with others. Youth consultants need:

- Continued opportunities to participate in service learning activities
- Opportunities to evaluate and critique different projects
- Experience in designing and implementing a service learning project

Teamwork Experience

We have found that having a team of youth consultants has worked best for us, and there are some things that we have done to become a good team. We recommend that youth consultants gain knowledge and experience in working within a group. This can be done if youth consultants are trained to work as a team by:

- Working on team-building skills (like trust) by participating in a ropes course, often sponsored by 4-H
- Spending "fun time" together in outside activities such as going out to eat or to swim parties
- Being given "safe environments" to grow individually and as a group
- Completing assigned tasks as a group, with adult guidance but without adult interference
- Being given opportunities to work on committees with adults and community leaders where their ideas are treated equally

Communication Skills

Youth consultants are asked to speak, listen, and write about their service learning experiences and share their knowledge with many different kinds of people, including other students, teachers, principals, parents, legislators, and community leaders. It is very important that their communication skills be the best they can be. Youth consultants need:

- Knowledge and practice in oral presentations, such as organization of information, clear enunciation, voice projection, establishment of eye contact, and poise. People need to be able to hear and understand what you have to say.
- Knowledge of writing including good grammar, punctuation, and logical organization of information. Informing the public through writing means your writing must be clear.
- Practice in listening skills. Youth consultants must be ready to answer lots of questions.

Responsibilities

The acceptance of the role as a youth consultant involves the commitment of personal responsibility. Youth consultants for service learning have responsibilities aside from actual participation in service learning projects. You will have additional responsibilities in dealing with school requirements, extracurricular activities, and family obligations.

School

An example of showing personal responsibility could occur when you are asked to miss class for a service learning activity. As a youth consultant, you would be responsible for informing your teachers as to when and where you would be going. You would also be responsible for completing any missed work and for maintaining acceptable academic progress. This acceptance of self-responsibility may make it easier for a teacher to release the student from class time in the future.

Team

Another responsibility is that of team cooperation. Youth consultants will need to motivate and encourage the other youth consultants. As a youth consultant, you will be responsible for any assignments you are asked to complete by others in the group. The ability to work with others in a cooperative manner for the good of the group is an additional characteristic of a responsible youth consultant.

Reflection

Reflection on one's strengths and weaknesses is an important aspect of being a youth consultant. A youth consultant has the responsibility to maintain a positive attitude when making suggestions to others. This includes the ability to appropriately critique and evaluate your own work as well as the work of others in your group. Using journals for reflection and goal setting is a good way to accomplish this.

Keeping Up With Service

If you are a youth consultant, you should be knowledgeable about any of your service learning projects. This includes an understanding of the steps needed to successfully complete the project. The responsible youth consultant should also be able to identify any personal skills needed to accomplish the goals of the project.

Time Management

A major responsibility of youth consultants is to properly prioritize time. Successful youth consultants will recognize time limitations and constraints. Responsible youth consultants must choose additional activities carefully in order not to be overextended. Consultants should identify school responsibilities, extracurricular obligations, and any other commitments. As a youth consultant, you should develop a time-management strategy to help organize your schedule. One idea is to prepare a calendar to help chart daily and/or weekly activities. Being organized helps to prepare you for future commitments.

If you work and act responsibly in dealing with service learning commitments and other obligations, you will become an exemplary youth consultant.

Presentations

Youth consultants are expected to be able to speak knowledgeably about service learning. Sometimes this will involve formal presentations, and at other times it will involve speaking in informal settings.

Formal Presentations

Formal presentations are those for which the youth consultants have previously prepared. These presentations are usually given to large groups of people found in civic organizations, classes, workshops, and conferences. The audience can include adults—teachers, parents, and community leaders—and/or students—younger, peers, or older.

There are many things the youth consultant needs to do in order to conduct a successful presentation.

First, the youth consultant needs to be prepared. This includes:

- Expertise in the assigned topic. The youth consultant should be prepared by being knowledgeable and having an understanding of service learning and specific projects.
- Preparation of an outline which gives topics and the order in which they should be discussed.
- Preparation of any supplementary materials like handouts, overheads, and resources. These should also be organized and ready to be shared during the presentation.
- Competent speaking skills such as voice quality and tone, posture, facial expression, body movement, and eye contact.

In order to be best prepared, practice, both individually and as a group. Steps to consider before your actual presentation are:

- Go over your presentation mentally
- Tell yourself you can do it
- Get support from other members in your group

The youth consultant needs to be confident. Confidence will develop through practice and preparation. Being confident, the youth consultant will seem to be relaxed, enthusiastic, and interesting. The youth consultant needs to be aware that nervousness and distracting body movements can be detrimental to the presentation. As the audience perceives the youth consultant as confident, they will gain interest and place more value on the meaning of the presentation.

The youth consultant needs to understand the purpose of the presentation, know the level of understanding and age of the audience, know appropriate audience interaction techniques, and feel the mood of the audience. Plan ahead to keep the audience involved and interested.

- Have a variety of activities for the audience such as games, handouts, small group work, video, and hands-on materials
- Use personal stories or testimonies
- Ask direct questions of the audience
- Involve the audience by movement
- Use humor
- Move around the room
- Have an attention grabber in your back pocket to use as needed
- Offer a question and answer session as an effective way to close a formal presentation

Finally, you need to be able to adjust your presentation as the need arises. This may be because of the age or mood of the audience. For example, younger students need more hands-on activities; the presentation needs to be upbeat and contain few dry facts. Groups of peers need less attention grabbers but still need the speaker to be enthusiastic. Older students need less hands-on activities, and the presentation needs to get to the point with the purpose of the presentation firmly planted in the audience's mind. Adults can sometimes be more business minded and need to know what it will do for them. Indicators that

you are losing your audience may include:

- Slouching in their seats
- Talking and whispering
- Writing notes
- Avoiding eye contact
- Not responsive to questions
- Staring into space

This is when a change to a different activity, or using that attention grabber, might be necessary!

Remember that as a presenter it is important to put your best foot forward and go forth with the ideals of service learning. Sometimes **how** you say it is as important as what you are saying. Enthusiasm for service learning is imperative to motivate others to become involved.

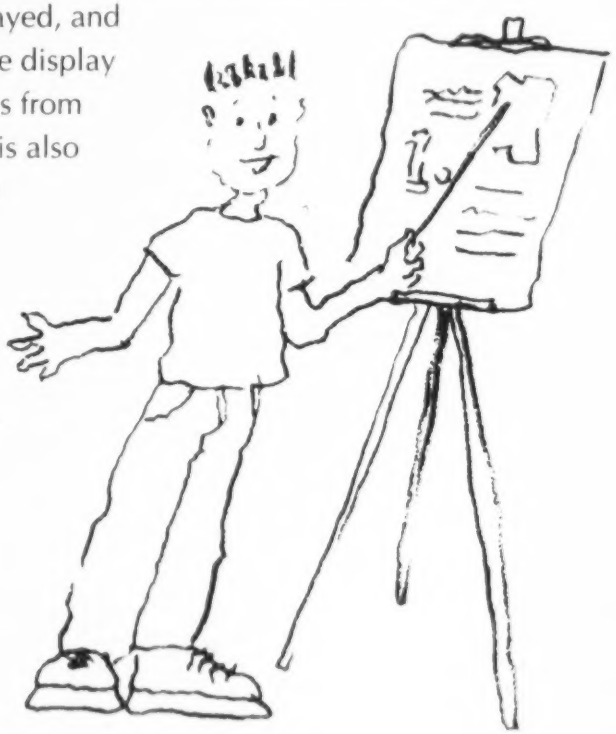
Informal Settings

In order for youth consultants to be prepared for informal discussions, it is necessary that they are involved in their school's service learning projects. This involvement allows the youth consultant to discuss the details of a specific project, the benefits of service learning to the community and to the student, and the process needed to successfully complete any service learning activity. A knowledgeable youth consultant should be able to confidently convey the practices of service learning at any opportunity.

In an informal setting, no extra preplanning or practicing is needed. You will be involved due to your service learning knowledge and experience. In some cases, the audience simply asks questions, and the youth consultant responds. The youth consultant should speak casually. To an audience, this method can be very impressive. This gives the audience the chance to gain insight about the youth perspective. It also gives you the opportunity to share personal feelings and expertise on service learning.

Examples of informal settings include:

- Visitors observing service learning activities at a school—this setting offers the opportunity for focus groups and small sharing sessions
- Phone conferences
- Discussions at service work sites
- Communications via the Internet
- Impromptu sessions
- School service learning fairs—pictures and descriptions of service learning activities are displayed, and youth consultants man these display boards, answering questions from those attending the fair—this also happens at local, state, and national conferences
- Display boards are also used to tell the service learning story at school open houses and shopping malls



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Benefits

Being a youth consultant comes with privileges and benefits as well as responsibilities. All of the hard work pays off when you get the warm fuzzy feeling from knowing you have helped others. You get the opportunity to meet new people and to share your experiences as you teach and motivate others. This helps in your personal growth as you increase your sense of worth and your own self-esteem. An added bonus to being a youth consultant is the opportunity to travel, not only around your community and state, but also around the nation as you attend conferences and workshops. Your worldwide knowledge expands, and you get to see what is going on in other places as you learn from others as they are learning from you.

The work you do as a youth consultant can be listed as experience on college applications and job resumes. What you have learned as a leader in service learning will set you apart.

Skills that will help you in life are learned through work as a youth consultant. You learn speaking skills when presenting to others, either formally or in informal settings. You gain experience in job skills by filling out applications, completing tasks, and working together as a group.

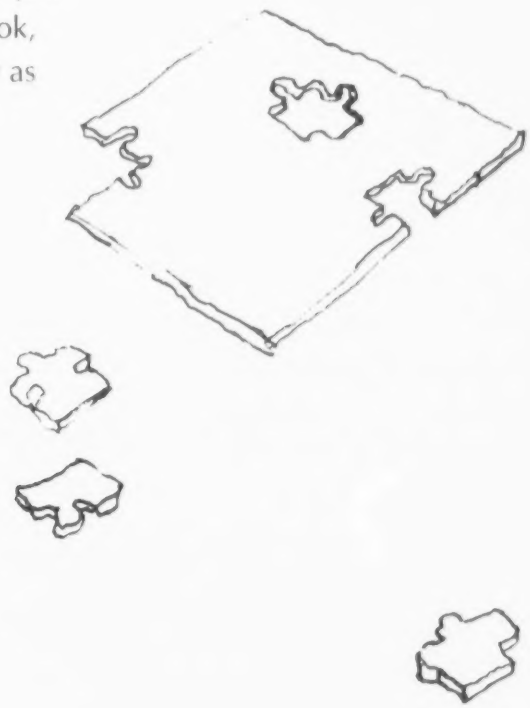
As a youth consultant, you are given opportunities to use and develop your creativity. As you develop and implement presentations, you are encouraged to try new approaches or methods to most effectively reach your audience.

Although being a youth consultant can be hard work, there are many benefits. One of the best is that it is fun!

Your Turn to Put It All Together

As you assemble the pieces we have provided for you, we hope we have succeeded in our goal to educate and motivate you about becoming a youth consultant.

Just remember: Any task you undertake may have twists and turns, missing parts, and hidden challenges. Being a youth consultant is no different. But don't quit. Step back, take a different look, and persevere. You will grow as you make a contribution to your community and to the world.



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